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FREER GALLERY OF ART  
ARTHUR M. SACKLER GALLERY

# Occasional Papers

**A Freer Stela  
Reconsidered**

Stanley K. Abe



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**2002/Vol. 3**

FREER GALLERY OF ART  
ARTHUR M. SACKLER GALLERY  
SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION  
WASHINGTON, D.C.

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1380  
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Aimed at the specialist audience, the Occasional Papers series represents important new contributions and interpretations by international scholars that advance art historical and conservation research. Published by the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, the series is a revival of the original Freer Gallery of Art Occasional Papers. Contributions, including monographic studies, translations, and scientific studies of works of art span the broad range of Asian art. Each publication draws its primary emphasis from works of art in the Freer and Sackler collections.

Edited by Gail Spilisbury  
Designed by Denise Arnot  
Typeset in Garamond and Meta  
Printed by Weadon Printing &  
Communications, Alexandria, Virginia

Cover and frontispiece: Details, stela, said to be from Fuxian, Shaanxi Province. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 521. Red sandstone; 70 x 34.2 x 8.2. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Purchase, F1969.5.

Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Abe, Stanley K.  
A Freer stela reconsidered / Stanley K. Abe.  
p. cm. — (Occasional papers;  
2002/vol. 3)  
Accompanies the exhibition Chinese  
Buddhist Sculpture in a New Light at  
the Freer Gallery in Washington, D.C.,  
Apr. 14, 2002 to May 4, 2003.  
Includes bibliographical references.  
1. Relief (Sculpture), Buddhist—China—  
Fu Xian. 2. Relief (Sculpture), Chinese—  
China—Fu Xian. 3. Stele (Archaeology)—  
China—Fu Xian. 4. Sculpture—Expertising.  
5. Relief (Sculpture)—Washington(D.C.)  
6. Freer Gallery of Art I. Title. II.  
Occasional papers (Freer Gallery of Art :  
2002); vol. 3.  
NB1280.A24 2002  
732.71—dc21

Funding for this publication was provided by the Freer and Sackler Galleries' Publications Endowment Fund, initially established with a grant from the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation and generous contributions from private donors.

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Note: Dimensions given throughout are in centimeters; height precedes width precedes depth.

2001007560  
CIP



Smithsonian  
Freer Gallery of Art and  
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## Acknowledgments

I am very grateful to Jan Stuart for offering me the opportunity to contribute to the Occasional Papers series of the Freer Gallery of Art and the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery. The comments and suggestions on the manuscript by Jan and an anonymous outside reader helped to clarify many aspects of the essay. Gail Spilsbury provided wonderful guidance throughout the writing process and her editorial assistance was very much appreciated. Thanks to Vidya Dehejia, acting director of the Freer Sackler, for the galleries' ongoing support of this series and to the publications department, headed by Lynne Shaner.

The support staff of the Freer and Sackler galleries—the administrative assistants, the art handlers, the librarians and their assistants—have provided innumerable acts of kindness to the author over the years. Thank you all, past and present, for your patience, generosity, and friendship. This paper is dedicated to you and the ideals of collegiality and scholarship that you sustain even in the most difficult of circumstances.

Research in Shaanxi Province would not have been possible without the help of Chang Qing, Pei Jianping, Wang Changqi, Wang Baoping, Luo Hongcai, Shao Wenliang, and Chen Xinxin. In Japan, Ishimatsu Hinako, Okada Ken, Fujioka Yutaka, Hara Michihiko, Gotou Keiichi, and Kumazawa Masayuki provided invaluable advice and support. I offer special thanks to Ishimatsu Hinako for introducing my research project to Professor Satō Chisui, which resulted in the opportunity to present my research at Okayama University and to receive the valuable comments of Professor Satō as well as Professors Kamitsuka Toshiko and Yamabe Nobuyoshi. I am also grateful for the kind assistance of Ben Bronson, Bettina Clever, Koizumi Yoshihide, Benjamin Yim, and Mino Yutaka.

Texts in the extant Chinese Buddhist canon are cited according to the printed edition *Taishō shinshū daizō kyō*, edited by Takakusu Junjirō and Watanabe Kaikyoku (Tokyo: Taishō issaikyō kankōkai, 1924–1935), abbreviated as T. followed by the number of the text. Transliteration of Chinese follows the pinyin system and for Japanese, the revised Hepburn system. All terms that appear in Webster's *Third New International Dictionary* are considered to have entered the English language and are not italicized. All figures are from China or said to be of Chinese origin.

## The Author

Stanley K. Abe is associate professor in the Department of Art and Art History, Duke University. He received his Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley. In addition to Chinese Buddhist and Daoist imagery, he has published on the historiography of Buddhist art history and contemporary Chinese art. His publications include “Inside the Wonder House: Buddhist Art and the West,” in Donald Lopez Jr., ed., *Curators of the Buddha* (University of Chicago Press, 1995) and “No Questions, No Answers: China and *A Book from the Sky*,” *Boundary 2* 25, no. 3 (Fall 1998). His book *Ordinary Images*, a critical re-reading of early Chinese religious imagery and patronage, was published by the University of Chicago Press in 2002. With Jan Stuart, Dr. Abe is co-curator of the exhibition *Chinese Buddhist Sculpture in a New Light* (April 14, 2002–May 4, 2003) at the Smithsonian’s Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. He is now researching a book tentatively titled *A History of Chinese Buddhist Art*, a study of the “discovery” of Chinese Buddhist art and its use-value in China, Japan, Europe, and the United States from the nineteenth century to the present.

## A Freer Stela Reconsidered

In the collection of the Freer Gallery of Art there are more than two hundred Chinese Buddhist sculptures, including both complete and fragmentary works. Limited exhibition space forces many of these objects to be kept in storage, although periodic rotations refresh the selections on view. Most of the works, however, will never be displayed. What factors determine which sculptures are placed on view, and how do these pieces differ from the ones left in storage? Why is one sculpture judged to be more important than another? What determines the value of a piece of Chinese sculpture? What are the assumptions that inform the evaluation of these pieces? Are all of the works on display as ancient as they are purported to be, and how do scholars distinguish genuine antiquities from more recent copies or fakes?

These are some of the questions that are addressed by the Freer Gallery's special exhibition *Chinese Buddhist Sculpture in a New Light* (April 14, 2002 to May 4, 2003). The exhibition has been organized to reevaluate works from the gallery's collection of Chinese Buddhist sculpture. Some pieces have never been displayed to the public; others have not been exhibited for many years. Among the latter is a red sandstone stela (fig. 1), which is dated by inscription to 521 of the Northern Wei dynasty (386–534). The stela entered the Freer's collection in 1969, and its authenticity as a work of the Northern Wei dynasty has never been questioned. When first published by the Freer Gallery in 1972, the stela was described as follows:

The stele is related to a group of similar Northern Wei pieces said to have come from Fu Hsien [Fuxian] in Shensi [Shaanxi] Province. Characteristic of these Fu Hsien reliefs is the reddish sandstone and fine linear articulation of forms. The full jowls, incised hair and eyebrows, and elongated earlobes are common features. The upper section of the stele, now lost, probably depicted two dragons and symbolic representations of sun and moon. These features are closely related to Taoist [Daoist] concepts and reflect the fusion of both Taoist and Buddhist ideas.<sup>1</sup>





The above understanding of the stela has remained largely unchanged to the present day. As increasing numbers of sculpture from China are discovered and published, scholars are provided materials with which they hope to refine the understanding of works such as the Freer stela in ways not possible in the past. Additional materials, however, do not always provide conclusive answers regarding provenance and authenticity. The exhibition *Chinese Buddhist Sculpture in a New Light* raises as many questions about the objects in the Freer collection as it answers. It is in the same spirit that this essay will review the scholarship that informed the description in 1972 of the Freer stela and reconsider its place among examples of Northern Wei sculpture from Shaanxi Province known today.

### The Fuxian Style



Fig. 2. Map of Shaanxi Province. Linda Huff.

The Freer stela was first published in an essay in 1954 by Matsubara Saburō (1918–1999), the eminent Japanese scholar of Chinese sculpture. Professor Matsubara identified the stela as having formerly been in the private collection of Fujiki Shōichi in Osaka.<sup>2</sup> The stela was subsequently published in 1966 in Matsubara’s compendium of Chinese Buddhist sculpture.<sup>3</sup> Soon after, in 1969, the Freer

Gallery of Art purchased the work from the well-known dealer Yamanaka and Company.<sup>4</sup> The Freer Gallery’s description from 1972 closely follows Matsubara’s essay from 1954, in which he identified a regional style of Northern Wei sculpture centered around Fuxian in northern Shaanxi Province (fig. 2). Matsubara’s essay was slightly modified and published in his book on Chinese Buddhist sculpture.<sup>5</sup>

A significant body of Northern Wei sculpture from Shaanxi Province became available for study in the 1980s and 1990s. Matsubara incorporated some of these materials into a third version of his original essay, published in 1995.<sup>6</sup> But, the discussion of the Freer stela in the most recent essay, with only two minor modifications, remains word-for-word unchanged. Matsubara’s attribution of the Freer stela to a “Fuxian style” now dates back nearly half a century. Although the identification of a Fuxian style has an even older history, as will be discussed below, there is little evidence on which to base a style of sculpture

Fig. 1. Stela, said to be from Fuxian, Shaanxi Province. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 521. Red sandstone; 70 x 34.2 x 8.2. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Purchase, F1969.5.



Fig. 3. Stela, said to be from Fuxian, Shaanxi Province. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 508–511. Yellowish gray sandstone; height 51. Eisei-Bunko Museum, Tokyo. Photograph courtesy of the Eisei-Bunko Museum, Tokyo.





Fig. 4. Rubbing of stela. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 513. Ink on paper. From Ōmura Seigai, *Shina bijutsushi chōsohen* (History of Chinese art, sculpture volume), fig. 621.

specific to Fuxian. How then did the Fuxian style emerge as a category of Chinese Buddhist art?

The earliest mention of a Northern Wei work from Fuxian is in the pioneering study of Chinese sculpture by Ōmura Seigai published in 1915. Ōmura identified a stone sculpture (fig. 3)—now in the collection of the Eisei-Bunko Museum, Tokyo—as from a temple named the Shilesi in Fuzhou, the old name for Fuxian.<sup>7</sup> The author, however, does not indicate the source of his information. Based on the term *daomin* (Daoist follower) in the inscription, Ōmura understood the image to represent a Daoist deity and published the Eisei-Bunko stela together with two Northern Wei examples of Daoist sculpture. One was a work dated to 513, only preserved in a rubbing, with the main image named as the Daoist deity Tianzun in the inscription (fig. 4). The second was a stela dated to 521 in which the central image, like the Tianzun figure, wears a tall hat, holds a *zhuwei* (a fanlike object) in his right hand, and has a belt across his midsection (fig. 5). The pair of dragons above the figure, the position of the hands and feet, and the distinctive pointed sleeves are also nearly identical in the two works.<sup>8</sup>

In 1925, the renowned scholar of Chinese art Osvald Sirén published a group of works from collections in Japan, Europe, and the United States, many purchased in Xi'an, and one or two “from the caves at Shih Fang ssu [Shifangsi] near Fu Chow [Fuzhou], a place about 150 miles north of Sian-fu.”<sup>9</sup> From the location in relation to Sian-fu (present-day Xi'an, known as Chang'an during the Northern Wei dynasty), it is clear that Sirén is referring to the same Fuzhou as Ōmura. Sirén



Fig. 5. Stela. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 521. Sandstone; height 42.5. Benjamin W. Yim Collection. Photograph courtesy of Benjamin W. Yim.





Fig. 6. Standing figure, from Shih Fang ssu [Shifangsi], Fuchow [Fuxian], Shaanxi Province. Date unknown. Stone, dimensions unknown. From Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Sculpture from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century*, 2: pl. 123A.



Fig. 7. Standing bodhisattva. Possibly Northern Wei dynasty or early twentieth century. Light yellow-brown stone; 42.9 x 19.5. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. F1909.87.

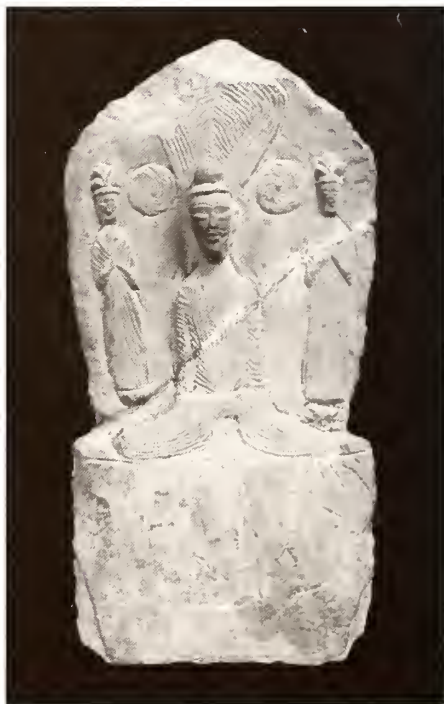


Fig. 8. Stela. Northern Wei dynasty. Sandstone; height 36. Tokyo National Museum TC 26. Photograph courtesy of the Tokyo National Museum.



also published the Eisei-Bunko sculpture (see fig. 3) and reported that the work was “said to have come from Shih Fang ssu.”<sup>10</sup> Whether Shifangsi is the same temple as Shilesi recorded by Ōmura is not clear. What is apparent is that the attribution of the Eisei-Bunko sculpture to Fuzhou/Fuxian by Ōmura and Sirén is anecdotal.

In addition, Sirén published a photograph “taken many years ago by Mr. Hayasaki of Tokyo” of a standing figure in a cave at Shih Fang ssu (fig. 6).<sup>11</sup> According to Sirén, the Eisei-Bunko sculpture (see fig. 3) was in the collection of Hayasaki Kōkichi at that time.

Sirén followed Ōmura in recognizing the Daoist orientation of much of the sculpture from Fuxian as well as the “quite arbitrary iconographic arrangements which may be either Taoist or Buddhist.”<sup>12</sup> Sirén also noted the primitive quality of the group, a characteristic attributed to the lack of “artistic genius” in “a remote corner of Shensi [Shaanxi].”<sup>13</sup> Two small works of Buddhist sculpture—standing bodhisattvas quite similar in style to each other—were also published and “said to come from Shih Fang ssu at Foo Chow.”<sup>14</sup> One had entered the Freer collection in 1909 (fig. 7); neither, however, remotely resembles the works identified with Shifangsi (see figs. 3 and 6) nor the style of the other sculpture in Sirén’s “primitive” group.<sup>15</sup> This should serve to alert us to the possibility that a provenance of Fuzhou and the Shifangsi was being loosely applied to any number of works for sale in Xi’an.

With his essay in 1954, Matsubara began a project—continued in 1966 and 1995—to expand and develop Sirén’s primitive Shaanxi category of sculpture under the rubric of the Fuxian style. The core works remain those identified by Ōmura and Sirén. Foremost was the Eisei-Bunko sculpture (see fig. 3), which Matsubara states was taken from the Shihongsi in Fuxian by Hayasaki Kōkichi in 1893.<sup>16</sup> Matsubara thus appeared to settle any remaining questions regarding the provenance of the sculpture, but he provided no explanation or evidence for his assertions. Hayasaki, who was in Xi’an with Okakura Kakuzō in 1893, was well known among scholars of the period.<sup>17</sup> If Hayasaki had brought the Eisei-Bunko sculpture to Japan, it is surprising that neither Ōmura in 1915 nor Sirén in 1925 mentioned this fact. If Hayasaki acquired the sculpture in 1893, did he actually take the work from the Shihongsi in Fuxian or was the work sold to him in Xi’an as a work “said to be” from Shihongsi? It is also unclear what the relationship may be between the Shihongsi and the Shilesi or the Shifangsi mentioned by Ōmura and Sirén. Are they the same temple under different names or are they different temples?<sup>18</sup> A long-standing but vague, traditional attribution to Fuxian has been transformed by Matsubara into a firm provenance. At the conclusion of his essay, Matsubara reproduces Hayasaki’s photo-

graph of the standing figure (see fig. 6)—published by Sirén as an undated sculpture from a cave at the Shifangsi—as another key work of Northern Wei sculpture from Fuxian.<sup>19</sup> One can discern here something of the manner in which Matsubara’s desire to formulate a Fuxian style of Northern Wei sculpture produces its own evidence *not* out of thin air, but through the careful shaping of historical circumstances, conjecture, and interpretation.

In 1954, Matsubara formulated three Fuxian-related stylistic groups of sculpture—A, B, and C groups. Seven works were included with the Eisei-Bunko sculpture in his primary Fuxian-style group. This A group consisted of one work in the Tokyo National Museum (fig. 8), one now in the Musée des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet, Paris (fig. 9), and two in the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago.<sup>20</sup> The remaining three works were in private Japanese collections. One is now in the Hamamatsu City Museum (fig. 10), while the whereabouts of the other two are unknown (figs. 11 and 12). In 1966, Matsubara added an eighth work—whereabouts also unknown—to the group (fig. 13).<sup>21</sup> Although all might be seen as “primitive,” there are obvious differences in motifs and styles among the eight works. None of the eight is quite like the Eisei-Bunko sculpture (see fig. 3) in the hand gesture of the main image, its wide, bulging belt, and the odd, seated position on a narrow throne. Also of note is the unusual manner in which the dragon heads are laid out to each side of the main image. The stylistic affinities among the group are strongest in the standing attendant figures and in some cases the flying figures behind the main image. The narrow, parallel lines of the robe of the Eisei-Bunko main image are repeated in a few of the other works, but not one approximates the distinctive scalloped contour of the robe’s bottom edge or the angular, spiky shape of the lower garment’s outline. It is striking that none of the A group works shares the unique style and iconography of the Eisei-Bunko sculpture. In his essay of 1995, Matsubara dropped the two Field Museum works but otherwise left the “A group” unaltered.<sup>22</sup>

In 1954, Matsubara proposed a secondary group of four works (B group) that were less directly related to the Eisei-Bunko sculpture but still within the lineage of the Fuxian style.<sup>23</sup> The group remained unchanged in 1966. The principal work was the Daoist stela dated to 521 (see fig. 5), previously published by both Ōmura and Sirén.<sup>24</sup> The three related works were one dated to 520 (fig. 14)—whereabouts currently unknown; the Freer stela (see fig. 1); and a work in the Ōhara Museum of Art, Kurashiki, dated to 520 (figs. 15 and 16). As Matsubara admits, the style of drapery on the main image of the Freer stela is different from the narrow, incised lines used on the other three works.



Fig. 9. Stela. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 528. Red sandstone; 54 x 33. Musée des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet, Paris EO. 1324. Photograph courtesy of Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, New York.

Fig. 10. Stela. Northern Wei dynasty. Sandstone; height 37. Hamamatsu City Museum of Art. Photograph courtesy of the National Research Institute for Cultural Properties, Tokyo.







Fig. 11. Stela. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 506. Sandstone; height 35. Present whereabouts unknown. From Matsubara Saburō, *Chūgoku bukkyō chōkokushi ron* (Historical discussion of Chinese Buddhist sculpture) 2:126a.



Fig. 12. Stela. Northern Wei dynasty. Sandstone; height 66. Present whereabouts unknown. From Matsubara Saburō, *Chūgoku bukkyō chōkokushi ron* (Historical discussion of Chinese Buddhist sculpture), 2:131a.

There are, in fact, more differences among the four works than similarities. For example, the Ōhara work is certainly similar to the Freer stela in design—both having a main image niche surrounded by rows of small serial Buddhas—a visual correlation that Matsubara emphasized by publishing the two side-by-side in both 1966 and 1995. But the Ōhara main image is more closely related to a sculpture dated to 518 (fig. 17), especially in the handling of the thin pleats of drapery, the serrated lower garment edge, and the bead pattern on the neckline. On the other hand, the flanking lions under the standing attendants are quite different; the Ōhara lions are similar to



Fig. 13. Stela. Northern Wei dynasty. Sandstone; height 50. Present whereabouts unknown. From Matsubara Saburō, *Chūgoku bukkō chōkokushi ron* (Historical discussion of Chinese Buddhist sculpture), 2:126b.



Fig. 14. Stela. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 520. Soft grey limestone; height 35.9. Present whereabouts unknown. From Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Sculpture from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century*, 2:127B.





Fig. 15. Stela. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 520. Sandstone; height 53. Ōhara Museum of Art, Kurashiki, Japan. Photograph courtesy of the Ōhara Museum of Art, Kurashiki, Japan.

Fig. 16. Rear, stela. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 520. Sandstone; height 53. Ōhara Museum of Art, Kurashiki, Japan. Photograph courtesy of the Ōhara Museum of Art, Kurashiki, Japan.

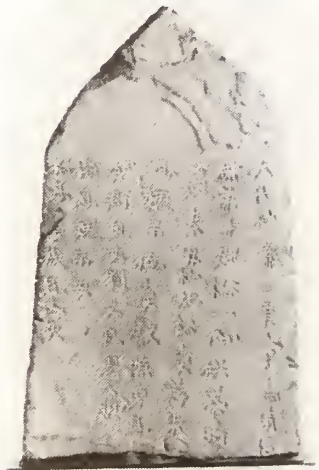


Fig. 17. Stela. Northern Wei dynasty. Sandstone; height 66. Present whereabouts unknown. From Matsubara Saburō, *Chūgoku bukkyō chōkokushi ron* (Historical discussion of Chinese Buddhist sculpture), 2:131a.

those in an A-group work (see fig. 13). As was the case with the A group, the visual correspondences do not lie at the level of complete objects but in terms of isolated motifs or discrete elements of visual style. In 1995, Matsubara retained his original B group and added—almost as an after-thought—two even less related works.<sup>25</sup>

To summarize, the “Fuxian style” was formulated in 1954 as a loosely related group of sculpture around two works said to be from Fuxian. One (see fig. 3), now in the Eisei-Bunko Museum, has an old but hazy attribution to Shilesi/Shifangsi/Shihongsi in Fuzhou. The second was the standing figure photographed by Hayasaki in a cave at Shifangsi/Shihongsi (see fig. 6). Reference to the latter work was dropped from Matsubara’s essay of 1995, possibly heeding the archaeological survey in 1986 of Shihongsi, which reports no Northern Wei dynasty sculpture and dates the remains to the Sui dynasty (581–618) and later.<sup>26</sup> Matsubara noted examples of Northern Wei sculpture discovered in Shaanxi Province in all three versions of his essay, but none were ever incorporated into his A or B groups.<sup>27</sup> The Fuxian style, in other words, was limited to a group of sculpture in collections outside of China, primarily in Japan and in private hands, known to Matsubara before 1954. A few works were added or eliminated between his essays of 1954 and 1995, but the core examples, the shape of his stylistic analysis, and even large portions of his text remain unaltered. What is indicated is the manner in which an argument about the provenance and authenticity of a body of sculpture can be established not on visual evidence but through rhetorical claims and repetition.

### The Freer Stela

The Freer stela was carved from a shallow rectangular piece of reddish sandstone 58.5 centimeters high (seventy centimeters including top and bottom projections), 34.2 centimeters wide, and 8.2 centimeters deep (see fig. 1). The sides and rear are unfinished. The tenon at the bottom indicates the stela was designed to fit into a base, while the top projection suggests that there was at least one attachment to the original work. The main image is a large seated figure flanked by two standing attendants (fig. 18). The cranial protuberance, small circle in the center of the forehead, and elongated earlobes are common attributes of a Buddha image, as are the plain monastic dress and the hands placed together in a gesture of meditation. Registers of small niches also containing seated Buddha figures are neatly arranged above and to each side of the main niche. Below the central niche are two figures dressed in monastic robes; one holds a mountain-shaped incense burner.

For the distinctive wide, flat pleats of the Freer main image,



Fig. 18. Detail, main image niche, stela said to be from Fuxian, Shaanxi Province. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 521. Red sandstone; 70 x 34.2 x 8.2. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Purchase, F1969.5.

Matsubara noted a similar style of drapery in two works: the Daoist work dated to 513 (see fig. 4) and a Buddhist image dated to 521 published by Ōmura now in the Cincinnati Art Museum (fig. 19).<sup>28</sup> The Daoist deity, however, is depicted with a tall hat, fanlike object in the right hand, and belt across the midsection—all typical visual elements of Northern Wei Daoist images not to be found in the Freer image. Also, the flat pleats are offset by a set of closely spaced parallel lines on the wide, pointed sleeves. Neither the fine lines nor the winglike sleeves are found on the Freer stela, and we find again that a stylistic similarity is countered by significantly differing visual elements in Matsubara's comparison.

In contrast, the Cincinnati Buddhist image (see fig. 19) matches the Freer stela not only in the flat pleats but also in the handling of the fall of drapery below the legs, the shape of the face and cranial protuberance, and the delineation of the facial features including a mustache. The background of the image niche—the decorative pattern using mandorla and flame—is handled very differently, but the tall attendant figures suspended on small pedestals are strikingly similar. Overall, it seems possible that the same workshop produced both the Freer and Cincinnati works. Publications of the rubbing of the Cincinnati sculpture state that the image was from Jingyang, just north of Xi'an, not Fuxian.<sup>29</sup> Inexplicably, Matsubara eliminated reference to the Cincinnati work in his discussion of the Freer stela in 1995.<sup>30</sup>

The Freer stela dedication, which is dated to 521, states that two





Fig. 19. Stela with seated Buddha.  
Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 521.  
Sandstone; height 25. Cincinnati Art  
Museum, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Philip  
R. Adams, Accession no. 1958.549.  
Photograph courtesy of the  
Cincinnati Art Museum.

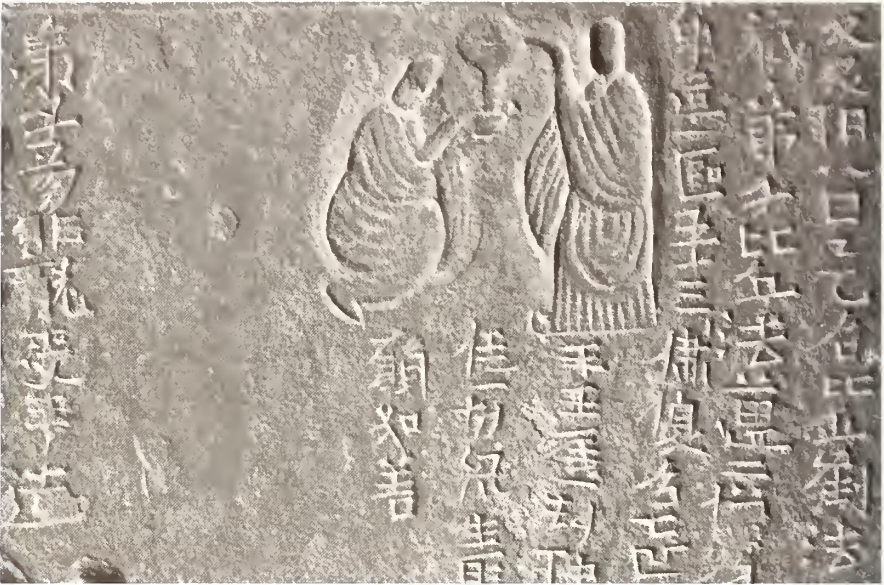


Fig. 20. Detail, inscription, stela said to be from Fuxian, Shaanxi Province. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 521. Red sandstone; 70 x 34.2 x 8.2. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. Purchase, F1969.5.

monks, Liu Fazang and Fa Zun, donated an image of fifty-three Buddhas for the benefit of their younger brother (fig. 20). The text covers just a little more than one-half of the lower register of the stela; the single line at the far left is difficult to read but begins with the characters *dizi* (disciple) and ends with *zao* (to make), an indication that another donor is being named. A separate line of text such as this is anomalous and may have been added some time later than the main dedication. The symmetrical design and finish of the images in the upper section tells us that they were conceived and completed as a single unit. It is less clear if the two figures and the incense burner were completed at the same time as the upper section or were carved at the time of the dedication. In any case, the stela was made with most, if not all, of the lower register left blank for the inscription.

Much of the line of text at the far left and a number of characters in the main body of the text are unreadable. While it is not unusual for individual characters on stone sculpture to be difficult to decipher due to damage (see fig. 5), it is unusual to find so many characters that are undamaged but unreadable. It was probably the case that the carvers of stela dedications were themselves not highly literate; they simply traced the lines composed and written for them.<sup>31</sup> The carver, in other words, may not have known that some of the characters were unreadable. But this fails to explain why such characters would be found among an otherwise conventional and legible dedication. In addition, note the variations in the size of the characters and the way the rows curve to the



left as the characters proceed downwards. The inattentive treatment of the text is in sharp contrast to the crisp carving and symmetry of the images above. Did the donors expend most of their funds on the carving of the upper registers and leave the dedication to a semi-literate carver? Or was the imagery completed in a sculpture workshop without a sponsor or dedication, and the inscription added by different and less attentive artisans at a later time?

There are other questions that we might ask about this work. The inscription states that the image consists of fifty-three Buddhas, an uncommon number found in two early Buddhist texts. In a translation of the *Wuliangshou jing* (Amitāyus sutra), fifty-three Buddhas precede the Buddha Amitāyus; and in the *Guan Yaowang Yaoshang er pusa jing* (Visualization on the two bodhisattvas, Bhaiṣajyarāja and Bhaiṣajyasamudagata, sutra), the names of the fifty-three Buddhas were transmitted by the historical Buddha Śākyamuni (566–486 B.C.E.) to the three thousand disciples who would become the thousand Buddhas of the past, present, and future kalpas.<sup>32</sup> In addition, the fifty-three Buddhas are mentioned in an inscription dated to 511 in the Guyang Cave at the Buddhist cave-temple site of Longmen, just south of the Northern Wei capital of Luoyang.<sup>33</sup> However, there are only thirty-five Buddhas (including the main image) depicted on the stela. To further complicate the issue, a set of thirty-five Buddhas is also found in the *Guan Yaowang Yaoshang er pusa jing* and in two other early Chinese Buddhist texts, the *Jueding pini jing* (The determination of the *vinaya* sutra) and the *Guan Xukong pusa jing* (Visualization on the bodhisattva Akasagarbha sutra).<sup>34</sup> While one might be inclined to link the fifty-three or thirty-five Buddhas to one of these texts, it is important to note that there is nothing else in the inscription or the iconography of the images to support a direct relationship between the stela and a specific text. There are no references to the bodhisattvas Yaowang or Yaoshang, for example. It is possible that the set of fifty-three Buddhas was derived from practices unrelated to any extant texts. After all, we know that many early Buddhist texts have been lost, and those in the extant Chinese canon are available to us only because they have survived the scrutiny of numerous official editors.<sup>35</sup> Also, the many different sets of multiple Buddhas—from seven into the thousands—known in this period suggest that they may have been largely interchangeable and broadly understood as efficacious. Finally, one wonders if the numbers five and three could have been reversed by mistake in the inscription.

The Buddhist monk donors, the reference to fifty-three Buddhas in the inscription, and the previously mentioned iconographical traits of the main image indicate that the image is a Buddha. Yet, Matsubara,



Fig. 21. Daoist stela.  
Northern Wei dynasty, dated  
to 515. Sandstone; height  
43.5. Osaka Municipal  
Museum of Art, Yamaguchi  
Collection. From Matsubara  
Saburō, *Chūgoku bukkyō  
chōkokushi ron* (Historical  
discussion of Chinese  
Buddhist sculpture), 2:134a.

Fig. 22. Rubbing of stela  
dedicated by Shi Lusheng  
et al., from Lintong, Shaanxi  
Province. Northern Wei  
dynasty, dated to 523.  
Sandstone; 215 x 77 x 27.  
Lintong County Museum,  
Shaanxi Province. From  
Zhang Yan and Zhao Chao,  
*Beichoo fodoō zoōxiōngbei  
jīngxuon* (Selected Northern  
dynasties Buddhist and  
Daoist stelae), 86.



following Sirén, was convinced that one of the characteristics of the Fuxian style was a mixture of Buddhist and Daoist elements. In this regard, Matsubara argued that the mustache on the Freer stela main image was a Daoist iconographical trait found, for example, on the main image of the Daoist stela dated to 521 (see fig. 5). The mustache, however, is often found on works in the Fuxian style that are wholly Buddhist in iconography (see figs. 17 and 19). While the reddish stone of the Daoist stela (see fig. 5) and the calligraphy are similar to the Freer work, the pointed-arch shape and design are completely different. In addition, the style of the drapery—the narrow parallel folds and the distinctive, pointed, winglike sleeves—is nothing like that of the Freer stela. There is little that relates the two stelae to each other.

Matsubara also argued that the missing top section of the Freer stela may have been similar to the upper part of the stela dated to 520 in the Ōhara Museum of Art, Kurashiki (see fig. 15). The resemblance between the two works in overall design is suggestive, but there are again a number of important differences. First, the Ōhara Museum sculpture is a single piece of stone. Also, the dedication is carved on the back (see fig. 16) in contrast to the Freer stela, which has an unfinished back. This indicates that the two works may have originally been set up in rather different ways: the Ōhara stela as a free-standing work with both front and rear on view and the Freer stela for placement against a wall or another surface. Other significant differences between the two can be seen: in the Ōhara main image the drapery pleats are thin, lion heads flank the image, the main niche is rectangular and lacks a decorative arch, and the lower section contains what appears to be a cart and procession. The two works are different enough to suggest caution in assuming that the missing upper section of the Freer stela was like the Ōhara stela—that is, triangular in shape or with similar dragon and bird motifs.

Matsubara believed that the Freer stela was originally similar to the Ōhara sculpture in combining main images that appear to be Buddhas with upper sections alluding to Daoism. But the placement of a single circle within the intertwined dragons in turn flanked by a pair of birds in the Ōhara work is not typical of Northern Wei Daoist stelae. Rather, the dragons are usually flanked by a pair of circles representing the sun and moon (fig. 21 and see fig. 5). A single circle within a pair of dragons is rare, one example being on a stela dated to 523 from Lintong, just outside Xi'an (fig. 22). In this case, the single circle, which appears to be a lotus design, is placed above a Buddha figure while the other side of the stela features a pair of circles above a Daoist deity.<sup>36</sup> A pair of birds is likewise uncommon and the motif is not found in conjunction with dragons (figs. 23 and 24). While the individ-





Fig. 23. Stela dedicated by Tian Liangkuan et al. Northern Wei dynasty. Sandstone; height 145. Beilin Museum, Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. Photograph by the author.



Fig. 24. Detail, Rubbing of stela dedicated by Qi Shuanghu et al., from Yaoxian, Shaanxi Province. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 520. Sandstone; 127 x 63-44 x 27. Yaoxian Yaowangshan Museum, Shaanxi Province. From Zhang Yan and Zhao Chao, *Beichoo fodoo zouxiongbei jingxuan* (Selected Northern dynasties Buddhist and Daoist stelae), 75.

ual motifs utilized in the decoration of the upper section are seen frequently, the combination of motifs is unknown in extant works of Northern Wei sculpture from Shaanxi. The extent to which the upper section of the Ôhara stela might be considered Daoist, in other words, remains unsettled.

In reconsidering past understandings of the Freer stela, we might reflect on how easily Matsubara's educated hypothesis about the missing upper section was treated as a probability by 1972. The attribution of the Freer stela to Fuxian was similarly repeated but with the cautionary phrase "said to have come from." What passes without remark is that it was the Eisei-Bunko sculpture (see fig. 3) that was said to come from Fuxian. The Freer stela was connected to the Eisei-Bunko sculpture only through a convoluted web of associations and stylistic relationships—primarily isolated motifs—involving many intermediary works. It is not surprising, therefore, that a direct comparison between the Eisei-Bunko sculpture (see fig. 3) and the Freer stela (see fig. 1) does not yield any notably close visual correspondences. Even the reddish sandstone said to be characteristic of Fuxian is not to be found on the Eisei-Bunko sculpture, which is yellowish gray in color. The wide range of stylistic differences among works subsumed under Matsubara's Fuxian style offers us a cautionary lesson regarding the manner in which the desire to produce a stylistic group based on matching motifs and visual elements obfuscates important formal differences between images.

## The Freer Stela Reconsidered

Sculpture similar to the Freer Gallery and Ōhara Museum stelae are uncommon in Northern Wei period sculpture from Shaanxi Province. Only four examples have comparable designs in terms of the large main image niche conjoined with registers of small Buddha niches. The most closely related work is one dated to 520 discovered in 1973 in the northern suburbs of Xi'an (fig. 25).<sup>37</sup> The work is seventy-eight centimeters high, larger than the Freer stela but similar in design. The main niche contains a seated Buddha image and two standing bodhisattvas surrounded by thirty-two small niches with seated Buddhas. The Xi'an stela has a single register of small niches below the main niche, as we find in the Ōhara work. The top of the Xi'an stela, although damaged, appears to have been carved in the form of a roof. The work was one piece of stone and there is no evidence of dragons, birds, or circles in the upper section. This suggests another possibility for the missing upper section of the Freer stela: an architectural element such as a roof. The lowest register of the Xi'an stela was not decorated although it contains the remains of a few characters, probably the name of a donor. Some nine lines of text—now very difficult to decipher—were carved on the rear surface of the stela over the parallel striations of chisel marks. It is odd that the text was carved on stone that had not been smoothed and prepared for the inscription.

The main image has its right hand raised in front of the chest in *abhaya* mudra and appears to be a Buddha figure depicted in monastic robes. There are no Daoist motifs such as the tall hat, fanlike object in the right hand, or the belt across the mid-section. The pattern of parallel incised lines is nicely varied on different sections of the drapery folds and produces thin pleats similar to those on the Ōhara work (see fig. 15). But the contour of the drapery ends over the front of the throne—a bold series of scallops with sharp points—and is different from the serrated pattern of the Ōhara and Freer images. While undeniably related in terms of design, the three works exhibit distinctive approaches to the rendering of the main image.

Another sculpture related in design to the Freer stela was purchased in Xi'an by Bernard Laufer some time between 1908 and 1910 and is now in the Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago (fig. 26). The inscription on the rear states that the work was dedicated in 532 by the governor of Luozhou, Xia Hourui.<sup>38</sup> From the manner in which the imagery is truncated at the top, we can see that the piece, which is fifty centimeters high, is a section cut from a larger stela. The sides and rear



Fig. 25. Stela from Zhangjiabao near Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 520. Sandstone; 78 x 34 x 6. Xi'an City Cultural Relics Protection Archeological Research Institute. From Xi'an shi wenwu baohu kao-gusuo, "Xi'an beijiao chutu Beichao fojiao zaoxiang" (Northern dynasties Buddhist sculpture excavated in the northern suburbs of Xi'an), *Wenbo* 1998, 2:23, fig. 10.

Fig. 26. Stela dedicated by Xia Hourui. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 532. Sandstone; height 50. Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, FMNH 121421. Photograph by the author.





are unfinished. The main image appears to be a Buddha, although the figure has a mustache and what remains of the cranial protuberance is very square and might have been a hat. The right hand is raised in *abhaya* mudra in a position nearly identical to that of the Buddha in the stela from Xi'an (see fig. 25). A very unusual feature is the painted rather than carved halo behind the head. The Buddha figure, and the standing attendant figures to each side are finely carved with beautiful drapery pleats of varied width and shape. Twenty-four small seated Buddhas in niches are preserved to the sides and in two registers below the main image. Two figures flanking a stand supporting a mountain-shaped incense burner are depicted on the bottom front. The figures in profile are similar to those in the rubbing dated to 513 (see fig. 4).

On the rear of the stone is a long inscription of seven lines that is difficult to decipher. The carving of the inscription raises some questions about the work. For instance, the surface of the stone was not prepared for the inscription; it was left rough and uneven. This is highly unusual, especially for such a long and elaborate dedication by a relatively high-ranking official. Second, the images on the upper front are truncated, and it is clear that the sculpture was once part of a larger work. Yet the inscription on the rear is not similarly cropped at the top. In other words, the dedication was written after this piece was cut from a larger stela, suggesting that the inscription was not part of the original stela but was added at a later time. One explanation—supported by the distinctive and unusual treatment of the drapery pleats and questions about the inscription—might be that the work is a modern forgery. But other possibilities exist: the stela may have been produced in the Northern Wei period but never dedicated, accounting for the blank areas on the left and right sides of the lower front. Subsequently, it was broken and at a later time, maybe soon after, the sculpture was thought to be valuable enough to have a dedication added. When this might have occurred is impossible to determine. But even if the inscription is modern, the stela could still be an ancient object. Certainly the style of the figures in the Field Museum stela is more consistent with the works dated to circa 520 than those of the 530s.<sup>39</sup>

Two other related works—both of their whereabouts unknown—should also be mentioned. The first, dated to 520, is preserved only as a rubbing (fig. 27), thirty-four centimeters wide, probably the whole width of the original work and nearly identical to the width of the Field Museum stela.<sup>40</sup> The design also appears similar in the two lowest registers, each with six small Buddhas in niches and just a trace of the bottom of the main image niche above. The short dedication starts with the date at the far right and continues between the familiar incense burner and pair

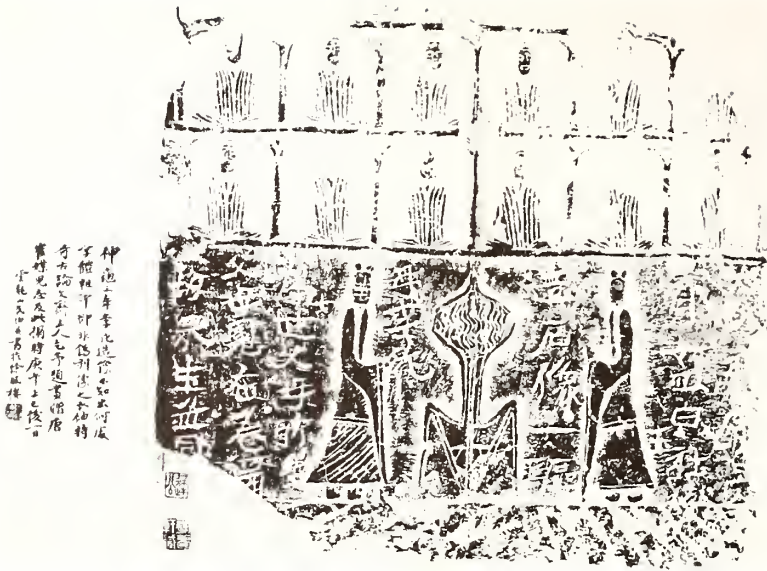


Fig. 27. Rubbing from stela dedicated by Li Hua. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 520. Ink on paper; 31 x 34. Beijing Library. From Beijing tushuguan, ed., *Beijing tushuguan-zang Zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian* (Corpus of stone rubbings of the past dynasties in the Beijing Library Collection) 4:83.

of figures in profile. The second work, also dated to 520, was included by Matsubara in his B group (see fig. 14) but has not been seen since Sirén published the sculpture in 1925. The main image appears to be a conventional Buddha figure with right hand in *abhaya* mudra, albeit pointing to the side at a severe angle (similar to figure 12). The fine parallel lines of the robes fall down the chest without overlapping, a pattern different from other main images. The flanking figures are unusual in that they turn toward the main image much like donor figures rather than attendant bodhisattvas oriented towards the viewer. The long fall of drapery over one arm and the distinctive coiffure are repeated in the kneeling donor figure in the lower register, which implies that the standing figures are secular donors rather than celestial attendants. Each also holds an object, possibly an offering—again most appropriate for a donor—in one hand. Although it is impossible to be certain from a photograph, the sculpture, which is only 35.9 centimeters high, appears to have been cut from a larger work. The edges of the four sides are rough and unfinished. There appears to be additional carving below the horizontal line at the bottom, and the row of small seated Buddhas above the main niche might be the first of a series of ascending registers. If so, the piece may be a fragment from a larger work not unlike the Freer stela.

The sculpture discussed above (see figs. 14, 25, 26, and 27) plus the work in the Ōhara Museum of Art (see fig. 15) are the works most closely

related to the Freer stela of 521 in terms of overall design, that is, the large main image niche combined with registers of small Buddha niches. The five works are all dated by inscription to 520 with the exception of the Field Museum piece of 532, which may have been inscribed some time after the execution of the sculpture. Although visually related and contemporaneous, the works are hardly identical. Especially noteworthy are the subtle differences in style—particularly the treatment of the drapery—among the main images and attendant figures. The wide, flat pleats found in the Freer Gallery stela main image are not to be seen in any of the other examples. The diversity of styles among the five works underscores the distinctive quality of the Freer’s stela.

### The Freer Stela and the Fuxian Style

In the nearly half century since Matsubara assembled his Fuxian-style group, a large body of Northern Wei sculpture has been uncovered in Shaanxi Province including a significant amount from areas in the vicinity of Fuxian.<sup>41</sup> Yet not a single work of Northern Wei sculpture has been published from Fuxian and none are known to Chinese scholars at the site.<sup>42</sup> Matsubara tacitly acknowledged this situation by dropping Fuxian from the title of his essay in 1995, while largely reproducing his 1966 text on the core works from 1954. Such a shift was anticipated by Mizuno Seiichi as early as 1960 when he suggested without citing examples or evidence that the Fuxian style was not restricted to Fuxian but applied to works found across eastern Shaanxi Province.<sup>43</sup> If Fuxian can no longer represent the site of an influential stream of Northern Wei sculpture in Shaanxi—one of Matsubara’s primary claims—the question of how one might locate and understand works such as the Freer Gallery stela still remains. The term “Fuxian,” attached so imperfectly to the group of small-scale works by Matsubara, is not easily replaced when we have no alternative provenance for these works.

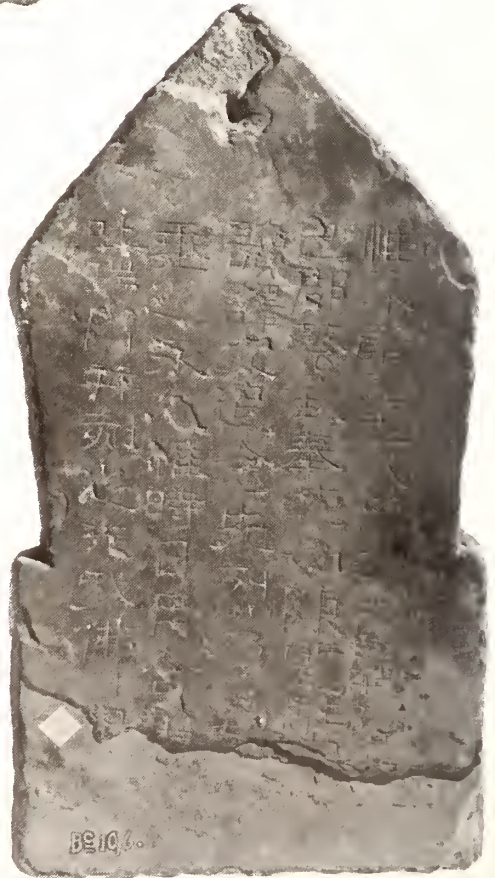
Ōmura, Sirén, and Matsubara were quite right in associating Daoist and mixed Buddhist and Daoist iconography with the sculpture of—if not Fuxian—areas of Shaanxi Province beyond the metropolitan center of Chang’an (Xi’an).<sup>44</sup> Large numbers of Daoist and mixed Buddhist and Daoist imagery have been discovered at sites such as Yaoxian, Lintong, and Fuping. But these sculptures are large stelae, some over two hundred centimeters in height (see figs. 22, 23, and 24). In contrast, the closely related group of Daoist pieces outside China (fig. 28 and see figs. 4, 5, and 21) are very similar in their pointed, flame-shaped outline, grayish stone, and size (figure 4 is a rubbing but the other pieces are





Fig. 28. Daoist stela.  
Northern Wei dynasty, about  
520. Yellow-gray sandstone;  
47 x 46.5. Museum für  
Ostasiatische Kunst, Köln.  
Inv.-No. Bc 10,6. Photograph  
courtesy of Rheinisches  
Bildarchiv, Köln.

Fig. 29. Rear view  
figure 28.



42.5, 46.5, and 43.5 centimeters high, respectively). The main images are nearly identical with tall crowns and high belts, holding a *zhuwei*, displaying prominent, long, winglike, pointed sleeves. In addition, the dated inscriptions of two of the small-scale Daoist stelae are thought to be modern. On the stela in Osaka illustrated in figure 21, the date is inscribed as a single isolated line on the proper left side of the base. Because dates are almost always embedded in a longer statement as to who made the image and why it was made, such a form for the date makes it highly suspect.<sup>45</sup> The crudely written inscription on the back of the stela in Köln (see fig. 29), which includes a regnal date that is unknown in the early sixth century, has long been labeled a forgery.<sup>46</sup> Because the style of the two stelae is consistent with the other two dated works (see figs. 4 and 5), most scholars consider the Osaka and Köln works to be genuine sixth-century sculpture with forged inscriptions.

There is not a single example of similar small-scale Daoist works among the dozens of Northern Wei works from Shaanxi Province. In fact, few works from Shaanxi are close in scale to works in the so-called Fuxian style group, which are typically thirty-five to fifty centimeters tall. A handful of small-scale Northern Wei stone sculpture has been discovered in and around Xi'an.<sup>47</sup> These works are heterogeneous in style and only one (fig. 30), discovered on the outskirts of Xi'an, bears a close resemblance to some sculpture associated with the Fuxian style.<sup>48</sup> The undated piece, only thirty-two centimeters high, features a seated Buddha with a mustache, hands folded in the lap, flanked by two standing attendants. The large head, long neck, sharply sloping shoulders, and narrowly spaced, parallel incised lines of the drapery are somewhat similar to works in the Tokyo National Museum (see fig. 8) and the



Fig. 30. Buddhist stela from Renjiashuang near Xi'an, Shaanxi Province. Northern Wei dynasty. Sandstone; 32 x 17. Xi'an City Cultural Relics Protection Archeological Research Institute. From Wang Changqi, "Xi'an chutu de Bei-Wei fojiao zaoxiang yu fengge tezhen" (Stylistic characteristics of Northern Wei Buddhist sculpture excavated in Xi'an), *Beilin jikan* 6 (2000): 105, fig. 4.





Fig. 31. Buddhist stela. Northern Wei dynasty, dated to 515. Sandstone; height 24. Present whereabouts unknown. From Matsubara Saburō, *Chūgoku bukkō chōkokushi ron* (Historical discussion of Chinese Buddhist sculpture), 2:133b.

Musée des Arts Asiatiques-Guimet (see fig. 9) or one dated to 515, present whereabouts unknown (fig. 31). Oddly, no halo or mandorla has been carved behind the main image. On the lower register there is a pair of well-dressed figures with the remains of donor names inscribed on each side. The Xi'an sculpture does not share the pointed, flamelike outline of many of the small-scale works outside of China. Rather, we find a rectangular piece of stone with three smaller seated Buddha images in niches across the top. The back and sides are unfinished and it is possible that this work was cut from a larger stela. But the placement of the three small Buddha niches is uneven—not part of an orderly register of niches as we find in the Freer stela—and there is no niche enclosing the main image. If this piece was part of a larger work, it would have looked rather different from the Freer stela or the Xi'an stela dated to 520.

Another odd feature of the small work is that the standing attendant figures are not of the same height. They are depicted more as a pair of donor figures, possibly male and female, than as the usual identical pair of deified attendants, such as those flanking the main image of the Freer stela. Another difference is the depiction of the donor figures in

the lower register. Such figures are consistently rendered as stiff figures in profile—often with a pointed winglike sleeve—flanking an incense burner (see figs. 4, 14, 17, 21, 26, and 27), the Freer stela monk-donors being a singular exception. The corresponding lower register in the small work from Xi'an is idiosyncratic in portraying the donors in elegantly delineated lines of drapery as well as relaxed postures suggestive of individuals engaged in a casual conversation. The register also lacks the ubiquitous motif of the incense burner. Is it possible that the lower register was not originally carved and the donor figures were added at a later time? Wholly conventional at first glance, the Xi'an piece is an unexpectedly problematic work.

The two Northern Wei works from Xi'an (see figs. 25 and 30) represent the tenuous visual relationship between sculpture in Shaanxi Province and works of the so-called Fuxian type. Neither of the Xi'an works have close counterparts in Shaanxi Province. In contrast, convincing stylistic groupings can be constructed around the previously mentioned Daoist stelae (see figs. 4, 5, 21, and 28), or between the Ōhara stela and the one dated to 518 (see figs. 15 and 17), or between the Freer and Cincinnati stelae (see figs. 1 and 19). In other words, the visual correspondences among certain Fuxian works within the Fuxian group are stronger than those between any Fuxian type works and extant sculpture from Shaanxi Province. This suggests the possibility that works in the Fuxian group are not actual products of the Northern Wei dynasty. In the early part of the twentieth century, dealers in the Xi'an area knowingly sold both Chinese antiquities and modern works made to look like ancient sculpture. This means that examples of genuine Northern Wei sculpture were available to guide the production of modern fabrications. In such a situation, the best-made works of modern sculpture cannot be easily differentiated from those that are genuinely old. It is now widely believed that many works of Chinese sculpture sold by Yamanaka and Company, from whom the Freer Gallery purchased its stela, were modern fabrications.

Therefore, we should not be surprised to find some works in China that are related in style to works sold to Japanese, European, and American collectors. The two Xi'an works (see figs. 25 and 30) that most approximate the style of some objects in the Fuxian group may represent the style of small-scale sculpture produced during the Northern Wei dynasty. The small number of such works from Shaanxi Province, however, suggests another possibility: that these objects were also made in the early twentieth century for sale abroad but were misplaced, buried, or otherwise forgotten, only to be rediscovered as chance finds in recent years. There is also the possibility that the Xi'an works are newly made and were buried in order to be discovered. Such



Fig. 32. Detail, left side image niche. Stela dedicated by the Fumeng family from Yaoxian Yaowangshan, Shaanxi Province. Northern Wei dynasty. Sandstone; 156 x 57–66 x 32. Photograph by Okada Ken.

works then serve to document the authenticity for other related objects newly produced for sale as antiquities.

It is not possible, however, to prove that any of the Fuxian type works are modern forgeries. Some may be ancient works; others may have been altered by later carving, additions, or inscriptions.<sup>49</sup> More importantly, the process by which the authenticity of a work such as the Freer stela is verified is far from perfect. The problem can be demonstrated by returning, in conclusion, to the sculpture in the Eisei-Bunko Museum (see fig. 3) that is “said to have come from Fuxian.” The work is unique among the Fuxian group in the seated posture of the main image, the position of the hands, the wide belt at the midsection, and the flanking dragon heads. The only image similar to the Eisei-Bunko sculpture is found on the Fumeng family stela (fig. 32), an unpublished work, 156 centimeters high, from Yaoxian,

Fig. 33. Huashiya Caves, right cave, left wall. Northern Wei dynasty. Photograph by the author.







Fig. 34. Huashiya Caves, right cave,  
right wall. Northern Wei dynasty.  
Photograph by the author.

some 115 kilometers south of Fuxian and seventy-five kilometers north of Xi'an.<sup>50</sup> The image is one of four on each side of the stela; the front and rear are Buddhist while the two sides including this figure appear to be Daoist. Although the surface of the grey stone is badly worn, it is possible to discern the same distinctive seated posture of the Eisei-Bunko sculpture, legs down with a splayed skirtlike lower garment. The hands appear to be held together in something close to the Eisei-Bunko's unusual mudra. Tremulous incised lines were used to depict the drapery,



and the outline of the ends of a sash suspended below the hands is barely discernible. There is a beaded pattern lining the opening of the upper garment, reminiscent of the motif on the Ōhara stela and the work dated to 518 (see figs. 15 and 17). The deep grooves, which are not found on any other part of the stela, were not likely part of the original. The Yaoxian stela appears to maintain a consistent early-sixth-century style throughout, but there is no Northern Wei dynasty date. Rather, an inscription dated to 1279 of the Yuan dynasty (1279–1368) has been preserved on the front. Again we are reminded of the possibilities of repeated dedications and recarving on Chinese stone sculpture.

The Eisei-Bunko sculpture also shares some qualities with sculpture from the small cave-temple site of Huashiya near Yijun, some fifty-five kilometers south of Fuxian, where three shallow rectangular sanctuaries, none with dated inscriptions, have been preserved.<sup>51</sup> In the far right cave, image groups consisting of a large seated figure and two standing attendants were carved in high relief on the three walls. Today, the remains of figures on the two side walls can still be seen. On the left wall, the central image has its hands placed together at the chest (fig. 33); on the right wall, the central image is in *abhaya* mudra. The standing attendant figures are the images most comparable to the Eisei-Bunko sculpture. In addition to the flat, splayed skirt with a scalloped contour, the attendant figures have similarly slender waists, short torsos, and large heads and ears. Furthermore, the raised bands of narrow flying drapery winding around the back, arms, and legs of the attendant on the right wall (fig. 34) are reminiscent of the flat ribbons held by the flying attendants above the Eisei-Bunko image (see fig. 3). The stone in the Huashiya caves, a yellowish gray, is nearly identical to that of the Eisei-Bunko sculpture.

In past scholarship, visual correspondences such as those noted above might have served as evidence if not proof that the Eisei-Bunko sculpture was an authentic work of the Northern Wei dynasty from Shaanxi Province. But neither the Fumeng family stela nor the Yijun Huashiya cave-temple is dated by inscription to the Northern Wei dynasty. The figure on the Fumeng family stela is unique among dozens of extant Northern Wei images from Yaoxian; the Yijun figures are small, standing attendants, not a seated main icon. Most important, neither the Yaoxian nor Yijun works corresponds to the small-scale pointed stela form of the Eisei-Bunko sculpture. The visual affinities are not between like types of sculpture and equivalent elements of visual imagery but between a motif from here and a pattern from there. In past scholarship, problems such as these have been ignored or rationalized in the interest of forming definitive conclusions. But visual affinities



alone cannot prove that the Eisei-Bunko sculpture is an authentic work of the Northern Wei dynasty. Rather, a visual affinity is only a reminder that there are similarities as well as differences between works of the so-called Fuxian style and sculpture in Shaanxi Province. The problem that remains is what to conclude from the visual relationship. Some may decide that the small-scale works outside China, while not from Fuxian, were indeed Northern Wei works from Shaanxi Province; others may not. The difference, as it seems to have been with Matsubara, will turn on the degree to which a scholar feels the need to establish a provenance for these works and their owners.

Compared to the Eisei-Bunko sculpture, the Freer Gallery stela has fewer affinities with extant works from Shaanxi Province. With reference to the Freer Gallery description of 1972, a question mark might be placed after nearly every assertion from “said to have come from Fuxian” to the reddish sandstone as characteristic of Fuxian to the hypothetical content of the missing upper section to the fusion of Daoist and Buddhist beliefs in the iconography. While the old description of the Freer Gallery stela may be found to be untenable, what has been discovered in this essay is not a corrective to past inaccuracies but a body of contradictory visual evidence, assertions, and interpretations. The evidence does not allow for any definite conclusions regarding the authenticity of the Freer Gallery stela or its relationship to the Northern Wei sculpture of Shaanxi Province. What scholars do in such circumstances has often been dictated by personal or institutional needs to assert certainty in spite of the evidence. No such assertion will be offered here. The above exercise in the matching of motifs and isolated visual elements has moved this study back to the ground so thoroughly worked by Matsubara. We have in a sense come full circle, but not to the point at which we originated our inquiry.

# Notes

1. Freer Gallery of Art, *The Freer Gallery of Art* (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1972), 177.
2. Matsubara Saburō, “Hoku-Gi no Fuken chihōchō ni tsuite” (Regarding Northern Wei Fuxian regional sculpture), *Kokka* 753 (1954): 360, fig. 8; 362.
3. Matsubara Saburō, *Chūgoku bukkyō chōkokushi kenkyū* (Research on Chinese Buddhist sculpture) (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1966), no. 72b.
4. According to museum records, the purchase was made from Yamanaka and Company, Osaka, Japan. The acquisition was announced in *Archives of Asian Art* 24 (1970–71): 90.
5. “Hoku-Gi no Fuken yoshiki sekichō” (Fuxian style stone carving in the Northern Wei), in Matsubara Saburō, *Chūgoku bukkyō chōkokushi kenkyū*, 19–41.
6. “Hoku-Gi Seian-sho ha sekichō no ikkeifu” (Genealogy of Northern Wei Shaanxi stone carving), in Matsubara Saburō, *Chūgoku bukkyō chōkokushi ron* (Historical discussion of Chinese Buddhist sculpture) 4 vols. (Tokyo: Yoshikawa kōbunkan, 1995), 1: 35–52.
7. Ōmura Seigai, *Shina bijutsushi chōsoben* (History of Chinese art, sculpture volume) (Tokyo: Bussho kankōkai zuzōbu, 1915), 300. For a discussion of the names applied to the region in different periods, see Yun Anzhi, “Shaanxi Fuxian shikusi kancha baogao” (Report on the investigation of the cave-temples at Fuxian, Shaanxi), *Wenbo* 1986, 6: 1.
8. Ōmura Seigai, *Shina bijutsushi chōsoben*, figs. 621–22. The stela dated to 521 has suffered damage to the front base since it was published by Ōmura. Thanks to Benjamin Yim for alerting me to the publication of this work in Ōmura’s book.
9. Osvald Sirén, *Chinese Sculpture from the Fifth to the Fourteenth Century* (London: Ernest Benn, 1925), 1: 1.
10. *Ibid.*, 1: 32 and 2: plate 124.
11. *Ibid.*, 1: 31 and 2: plate 123A.
12. *Ibid.*, 1: li.
13. *Ibid.*, 1: lii.
14. *Ibid.*, 1: 34 and 2: plates 131A and 131B.
15. The Freer Gallery bodhisattva, F1909.87, was purchased from Matsuki Bunkyō (1867–1940) in Japan. The second bodhisattva is in the collection of the Tokyo geijutsu daigaku (Tokyo University of Fine Arts and Music). See *Tokyo geijutsu daigaku, Tokyo geijutsu daigaku zōhin zuroku: chōkoku* (Illustrated catalogue of the Tokyo University of Fine Arts collection: sculpture) (Tokyo: Tokyo geijutsu daigaku, 1977), no. 31.

16. Matsubara, “Hoku-Gi no Fuken chihōchō,” 355.
17. See Yen Chuan-ying, “The Sculpture from the Tower of Seven Jewels: The Style, Patronage and Iconography of the Monument,” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1986), 47 and related Japanese references in note 32.
18. Archaeological investigations of the Shihongsi were conducted in 1956 and published in Shaanxi sheng bowuguan and Shaanxi sheng wenguanhui, “Fuxian Shihongsi, Gezitousi shiku diaocha jianbao” (Report on the survey of the Shihongsi and Gezitousi cave-temples, Fuxian), *Wenwu* 1959, 12: 19–22.
19. Matsubara, “Hoku-Gi no Fuken chihōchō,” 366.
20. Matsubara, “Hoku-Gi no Fuken chihōchō,” 365. For the two Field Museum works, neither illustrated here, see Sirén, *Chinese Sculpture*, 2: plates 125B and 129B. For a discussion of the latter, see Stanley K. Abe, “Provenance, Patronage, and Desire: Northern Wei Sculpture from Shaanxi,” *Ars Orientalis* 31 (2001): 17–18.
21. Matsubara, “Hoku-Gi no Fuken yoshiki,” 34.
22. Matsubara, “Hoku-Gi Seian-sho,” 47–48.
23. Matsubara, “Hoku-Gi no Fuken chihōchō,” 365.
24. Sirén, *Chinese Sculpture*, 1: plate 128A.
25. Both are in Japanese collections, one in the Masaki Museum of Art, Osaka, and one in the Osaka Municipal Museum of Art. See Matsubara, “Hoku-Gi Seian-sho,” 48, and *Chūgoku bukkō chōkokushi ron* 2: 182b and 281a, respectively.
26. Yun Anzhi, “Shaanxi Fuxian shikusi,” 2–10.
27. References to works in Shaanxi Province can also be found in a second essay of 1954. See Matsubara Saburō, “Hoku-Gi no Dōkyōzō” (Northern Wei Daoist imagery), *Bukkyō geijutsu* 22 (1954): 29–36.
28. Matsubara, “Hoku-Gi no Fuken yoshiki,” 31. Ōmura Seigai, *Shina bijutsushi chōsohen*, fig. 540; Ellen B. Avril, *Chinese Art in the Cincinnati Art Museum* (Cincinnati: The Museum, 1997), no. 14.
29. Beijing tushuguan, *Beijing tushuguanzang Zhongguo lidai shike taben huibian* (Corpus of stone rubbings of the past dynasties in the Beijing Library Collection) 100 vols. (Beijing: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1989), 4: 109.
30. Matsubara, “Hoku-Gi Seian-sho,” 45.
31. For example, the names of the composer of the inscription and the calligrapher are listed at the end of Hui Cheng’s elaborate dedication for the Duke of Shiping dated to 498 C.E. in the Longmen Guyang Cave. For the Northern Wei dedications in the Guyang Cave, see chapter four in Stanley K. Abe, *Ordinary Images* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).



32. T. 360, a third-century translation by Kang Sengkai (Saṅghavarman), and T. 1161 as translated by Jiangliang Yeshe (Kālayaśas) in the early fifth century. See Alexander C. Soper, *Literary Evidence for Early Buddhist Art in China* (Ascona: Artibus Asiae, 1959), 200–201.
33. Soper, *Literary Evidence*, 201. The inscription is number 613 in Mizuno Seiichi and Nagahiro Toshio, *Kanan Rakyō Ryūmon sekkutsu no kenkyū* (Research on the Longmen Caves, Luoyang, Henan) (Tokyo: Zauhō kankōkai, 1941), 303; and number 2235 in Liu Jinglong and Li Yukun, eds., *Longmen shiku beike tiji* (Record of stela inscriptions from the Longmen caves) (Beijing: Zhongguo dabai kequanshu chubanshe, 1998), 2: 493.
34. T. 325, an anonymous translation of the Jin dynasty (265–420), and T. 409, translated by Dharmamitra between 424–441 C.E. Soper, *Literary Evidence*, 206, note 17.
35. Kyoko Tokuno, “The Evaluation of Indigenous Scriptures in Chinese Buddhist Bibliographical Catalogues,” in *Chinese Buddhist Apocrypha*, ed. Robert E. Buswell (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1990), 31–74.
36. Zhang Yan and Zhao Chao, *Beichao fodao zaoxiangbei jingxuan* (Selected Northern dynasties Buddhist and Daoist stela) (Tianjin: Tianjin chubanshe, 1996), 86–87.
37. Xi’an shi wenwu baohu kaogusuo, “Xi’an beijiao chutu Beichao fojiao zaoxiang” (Northern dynasties Buddhist sculpture excavated in the northern suburbs of Xi’an), *Wenbo* 1998, 2: 23–24, fig. 10.
38. Field Museum of Natural History FMNH 121421. For the inscription, see rubbing number 434 in Field Museum of Natural History, *Catalogue of Chinese Rubbings from Field Museum* (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1981), 112.
39. For a stylistic comparison, see a stela dated by inscription to 532 from Xi’an in Wang Changqi, “Xi’an chutu de Bei-Wei fojiao zaoxiang yu fengge tezheng” (Stylistic characteristics of Northern Wei Buddhist sculpture excavated in Xi’an), *Beilin jikan* 6 (2000): 106, fig. 6.
40. Beijing tushuguan, *Beijing tushuguanzang Zhongguo lidai*, 4: 83.
41. See Jin Zhilin, “Yan’an diqu faxian yipi fojiao zaoxiangbei” (A group of Buddhist stela discovered in Yan’an), *Kaogu yu wenwu* 1984, 5: 32–45; Jin Zhilin, “Shaanbei faxian yipi beichao shiku he moya zaoxiang” (Northern period cave temples and cliff carvings discovered in northern Shaanxi), *Wenwu* 1989, 4: 60–66, 83; Yang Hongming, “Ansai xian chutu yipi fojiao zaoxiang” (A group of Buddhist images excavated in Ansai county), *Wenbo* 1991, 6: 55, 61.
42. For publications, see Shaanxi sheng bowuguan and Shaanxi sheng wenguanhui, “Fuxian Shihongsi,” and Yun Anzhi, “Shaanxi Fuxian shikusi.” The lack of Northern Wei sculpture from Fuxian is confirmed by scholars familiar with archaeological work at the site: Luo Hongcai and Pei Jianping, who accompanied the author to Yijun and Luochuan (only thirty kilometers south of Fuxian) in July 2001, Chang Qing, and the Japanese scholar Okada Ken.
43. Mizuno Seiichi, *Chūgoku no chōkoku: sekibutsu, kondōbutsu* (Bronze and stone Buddhist sculpture of China) (Tokyo: Nihon keizai shinbunsha, 1960), 41.

44. For an extended discussion of religious orientation and regional differences in Shaanxi Province, see Abe, “Provenance, Patronage, and Desire.”
45. Matsubara suggests that the date was a later addition in Matsubara Saburō, *Chūgoku bukkyō chōkokushi kenkyū*, 239, text entry for figure 6ob.
46. Leigh Ashton, *An Introduction to the Study of Chinese Sculpture* (New York: Scribner’s, 1924), 61–62, and Museum für Ostasiatische Kunst der Stadt Köln, *Buddhistische plastik aus China und Japan* (Buddhist sculpture of China and Japan) (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1972), 261.
47. See Wang Changqi, “Xi’an chutu de Bei-Wei fojiao zaoxiang” and Wang Changqi, “Liquansi yizhi chutu fojiao zaoxiang” (Buddhist images excavated from the ruins of the Liquan temple) *Kaogu yu wenwu* 2000, 2: 3–16. One other extant small-scale Northern Wei work is in the collection of the Shaanxi Provincial Museum of History and was found at Chenggu, over two hundred kilometers to the southwest of Xi’an. For this work, see Tokyo kokuritsu hakubutsukan, *Tō no jotei Sokuten Bukō to sono jidai ten: kyūtei no eiga* (Tang dynasty empress Wu and her times: the glory of the court) (Tokyo: NHK, 1998), number 4. Two small-scale works have been published from northern Shaanxi Province, one from Luochuan and the other from Ansai. But neither work is dated to the Northern Wei dynasty. See Jin Zhilin, “Yan’an diqu faxian,” 42, fig. 13, and Yang Hongming, “Ansai xian chutu,” 55.
48. Wang Changqi, “Xi’an chutu de Bei-Wei fojiao zaoxiang,” 105, fig. 4.
49. The modern reworking and reinscribing of ancient sculpture in the Xi’an area is discussed in Yu Tao and Yin Xiaqing, “Pinbulei shike zaoxiang de jianding” (Authentication of assembled stone sculpture), *Wenbo* 2000, 4: 67–71.
50. The stela is known as the Fumeng shi zaoxiang (Fumeng family stela). Special thanks to Okada Ken for sharing photographs, drawings, and notes on this stela.
51. Jin Zhilin, “Shaanbei faxian,” 60, plate 1, fig. 5, and 83. The report dates the cave temples to the Western Wei dynasty (535–557), but with no explanation of the basis for the dating.

## Glossary

Chang'an	長安
Chenggu	城固
<i>dizi</i>	弟子
<i>daomin</i>	道民
Eisei Bunko	永青文庫
Fa Zun	法遵
Fujiki Shōichi	藤木正一
Fumeng Wenqing	夫蒙文慶
Fumeng shi zaoxiang	夫蒙氏造像
Fuping	富平
Fuxian	鄜縣
Fuzhou	鄜州
<i>Guan Xukongzang pusa jing</i>	觀虛空藏菩薩經
<i>Guan Yaowang Yaoshang er pusa jing</i>	觀藥王藥上二菩薩經
Hamamatsu	浜松
Hayasaki Kōkichi	早崎硬吉
Huashiya	華石崖
Jiangliang Yeshe	僵良耶舍
Jingyang	涇陽
<i>Jueding pini jing</i>	決定毗尼經
Kang Sengkai	康僧鎧
Lintong	臨潼
Liu Fazang	劉法藏
Li Hua	李花
Luozhou	洛州
Matsubara Saburō	松原三郎



Matsuki Bunkyō	松本文恭
Meiji	明治
Mizuno Seiichi	水野清一
Ōhara	大原
Ōmura Seigai	大村西崖
Qi Shuanghu	錡雙胡
Renjiazhuang	仁家庄
Shaanxi	陝西
Shihongsi	石泓寺
Shilesi	石泐寺
Shi Lusheng	師錄生
Tian Liangkuan	田良寬
<i>Tianzun</i>	天尊
Xia Hourui	夏侯瑞
Xi'an	西安
Yamanaka	山中
Yan Xiaoluo	嚴小洛
Yaoxian Yaowangshan	耀縣藥王山
Yijun	宜君
<i>Wuliangshou jing</i>	無量壽經
<i>zao</i>	造
Zhangjiabao	張家堡
<i>zhuwei</i>	麈尾

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